



State Capitol | Lansing, Michigan 48913

PH (517) 373.6920 | FAX (517) 373.2751

www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/senator/kuipers/

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Contact: Darin Ackerman
517-373-6920

Removal of ban on scholarships for theology students passes committee

Lansing — A package of bills making college theology, divinity and religious education majors eligible for scholarships or grant money from the state of Michigan passed the Senate Education Committee, Sen. Wayne Kuipers (R-Holland) announced today.

Kuipers sponsored Senate Bill 629, part of the five-bill package that would end the practice of discrimination against certain types of academic study.

“This package of bills ensures religious-studies students are treated as any other,” Kuipers said. “My district has one of the premier religious study institutions in the nation in Hope College. These bills are important to numerous students in our community.”

At present, some students don’t have equal access to the more than \$242 million in grants and scholarships awarded yearly to students simply because they choose to study theology.

In one instance, a student filed a lawsuit against the state earlier this year over this issue. Federal District Judge George Caram Steeh ruled the state is prohibited from enforcing the statute preventing the student from receiving scholarship money.

The package that includes Kuipers’ bill would affect five programs: the Michigan Merit Award scholarship, the Michigan Educational Opportunity Grant, the Michigan Competitive Scholarship, the Part-time Independent Student Grant, and the state’s Tuition Grant programs.

Kuipers’ bill specifically would apply to students requesting state assistance to engage in religious studies at independent colleges such as Hope and Calvin.

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